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metric relationships. The transmission of information is likely to be restricted to the minimum of formal requirements in many instances, which hinders the most effective coordination of group activities. At the other end of the congruency range, difficulties may arise from failure to restrict communication to the technical requirements of the task.

The validity of these interpretations remains to be determined. For the present the foregoing data indicate that attention to status congruency is desirable from the standpoint of group productivity and interpersonal relationships alike. Procedures are needed not only for insuring moderate degrees of congruency in the induction of individuals into an organization, but also for the maintenance of individuals in optimal congruency as the organization continues to function. Progressive adjustments between ability, length of service, relevant experience, age, and other personal qualities appear to be necessary if strains of an individual and group character are to be averted.

The application of such procedures presupposes a knowledge of the significant status hierarchies in a given situation, and the organization of the group in a manner that satisfies the more fundamental conditions of congruency (a topic for further research). Comparison of status attributes reveals

some apparent differences in the importance of congruency in the several hierarchies, but further study of these differences is necessary.⁵

As a final point, it should be noted that there is an apparent antithesis between productivity and group euphoria, at least in settings such as the military organization. This is particularly evident with regard to euphoria in the sphere of interpersonal relations. There arises the question as to whether the antithesis is real or illusory. If the former, a problem is posed for those concerned with the organization and direction of groups, since it calls for a decision as to which of these conditions is to receive the major emphasis. To some extent the decision is made by the value system and the formal objectives of the group. Even in the military organization, however, the commander has some discretion as to how extensively he will subordinate group sentiments to technical productivity.

⁵ It would also be desirable to examine the effect of reducing the number of status attributes in the index, particularly by dropping those whose congruency seems least important. A uniform but non-significant increase in the slope of the performance regression line occurred in all crew positions when the variables of popularity, ability reputation, and role prestige were omitted from the index. This suggests that the predictive efficiency of the index might improve appreciably if the number of status hierarchies was restricted to four or five.

PERCEPTUAL OBSTACLES TO CLASS CONSCIOUSNESS

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A QUESTION of considerable importance in the field of the sociology of knowledge is why a particular existential base fails to produce patterns of thought appropriate to it. One of the less complex aspects of this problem deals with the relationship between class and class consciousness. In this paper we will indicate certain factors rooted in the social structure and in the nature of group membership which block people in a certain class position from becoming class conscious.

For many years students of social stratification have debated the nature of class.¹ Class has been

defined in a number of ways: (1) Class is accorded status in a community based on hierarchically structured social evaluation; class is thus determined by how others rank us.² (2) Class is subjective group identification based on "consciousness of kind" and private perception of one's place in a hierarchy; class is thus determined by where

¹ For a discussion of various definitions of class, see George Simpson, "Class Analysis: What Class Is Not," *American Sociological Review*, 4 (1939), pp. 827-835.

² See William L. Warner and Paul S. Lunt, *The Social Life of a Modern Community* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), chap. 5; W. L. Warner, M. Meeker, and K. Eells, *Social Class in America* (Chicago: Science Research Associates, 1949), Parts One and Two; and A. Davis, B. B. Gardner, and M. R. Gardner, *Deep South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1941), chap. III, for a discussion of methods of ascertaining class, based on accorded status.

we place ourselves.³ (3) Class is social classification or objective categorization; class is thus determined by social scientific taxonomy.⁴ (4) Class is a form of economic categorization; class position is determined by one's place in the economic system. The bases for categorization, overlapping but conceptually separable, are: (a) relationship to the ownership of the tools of production;⁵ (b) market situation;⁶ and (c) occupation. (5) Class is a form of political or power categorization; class position is determined by whether one rules or is ruled.⁷ (6) Class is a functional categorization; class position is associated with function performed in the social structure (though it may depend on other factors as well).⁸

In view of this wide range of definitions, it is impossible to incorporate all these notions into one concept of class. For the purpose of this paper, we will arbitrarily define class in objective terms. The best known of many possible objective definitions of class is the Marxian notion that class is determined by one's relationship to the ownership of the tools of production. Classes are understood to be separate, discrete groups.

Class consciousness, on the other hand, refers to the individual's psychological *perception* of his own position in the class structure. It contains a number of minimal elements: The individual must

identify himself with the class to which he belongs according to the objective definition; he must feel united with others in the same objective position; and he must feel separated from, or must dis-identify with, people in a different objective class position. These cognitive factors represent elements of awareness. They are often viewed as overlaid with affect, leading to characteristics such as intra-class friendship and inter-class antagonism and resentment.

This paper seeks to shed light on the following questions: What perceptual factors inhibit people in the same objective class position from recognizing their class unity, and what factors cause them to identify with another class? Why do they fail to structure the world within a class framework and view themselves as part of their appropriate objective categories? We will seek to indicate certain factors rooted in the economic and political institutional structures, and in the nature of group identification which promote a perceptual distortion of one's class position.

STRUCTURE OF LARGE-SCALE INDUSTRY

While the industrial situation highlights class differences and provides the most favorable context for the development of class antagonisms, there are a number of inherent factors which hinder class consciousness.

The first factor is the *structure of power* in an industrial organization. We might expect class antagonism to develop when one man resents taking orders from another but feels that he must do so under threat of penalty. Presumably the individual taking orders might consider this relationship unfair and seek to change it; a worker might dislike his employer for forcing him to do certain things and not do other things. In modern large-scale industry, however, power is relayed through a series of intermediate stations rather than by direct transmission from top to bottom. The Board of Directors may decide upon a policy, but it is the low level foreman or minor supervisor who directly and personally tells the worker what to do and immediately invokes discipline if it is not done. Aggression, if any develops, is more likely to be focussed on the immediate personal source of frustration, namely, the foreman who directly wields the power, than in an abstract, unknown, intangible unit referred to as the Board of Directors. It is a common phenomenon for soldiers to resent their non-commissioned officers

³ The interest-group theory presented in R. Centers, *The Psychology of Social Classes* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949), pp. 26-29, represents such an approach. On p. 27, he states: "Classes are psycho-social groupings, something that is essentially subjective in character, dependent upon class consciousness, i.e., a feeling of group membership . . ." R. M. MacIver, too, insists that the only factor distinguishing a social class from "a mere logical category or type" is class consciousness, in *Society* (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1937), p. 167. Since class and class consciousness are identical, one wonders at the need for separate terms.

⁴ For a discussion of class names as "classificatory concepts," see Llewellyn Gross, "The Use of Class Concepts in Sociological Research," *American Journal of Sociology*, LIV (March 1949), 410-411.

⁵ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (Chicago: Kerr).

⁶ H. H. Gerth and C. W. Mills (eds.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), pp. 182-183.

⁷ Vilfredo Pareto, *The Mind and Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1935), IV.

⁸ Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Imperialism and Social Classes* (New York: A. M. Kelly, 1951), "Social Classes in an Ethnically Homogeneous Environment," chap. 4.

—those seen as the immediate source of unhappiness—more than the remote Colonel or General who is broadly responsible for policy. Indeed, the higher-up may often be seen as a defender of the power-subject, protecting him against the intermediate. In the large-scale industrial organization, it is likely that the worker will feel more immediate antagonism toward, and separation from, his foreman—who is in the same class position—than toward remote and invisible loci of power.

The second factor deals with a deviant perception of occupational or economic unity. The immense complexity of industrial functions tends to promote an extreme sense of difference rather than unity among people, who, by a particular objective criterion, are in the same class. The multitude of industrial functions gives rise to a perception of difference among people in the same objective class. For example, a machinist, a bookkeeper, and a stock clerk may actually be alike with reference to ownership of the tools of production, but may perceive themselves as different from one another by virtue of the very different kinds of work they do—the different skills required, the forms of material or non-material manipulation, the social context, etc. Feelings of psychological separation may be created between white and blue collar workers not only in terms of work performed, but also by different physical positions in the plant and conditions of work. A clerical worker may feel that the symbol of a desk, telephone, and nameplate separates him psychologically from manual workers in the plant, ignoring the unity created by working for the same employer. A related point is that, since there are so many thousands of specialized, segmented jobs, the worker is more likely to notice differences in jobs rather than an underlying similarity.

Thirdly, people in different classes may feel themselves more strongly united with one another on the basis of their association with a common product or by virtue of common work experiences than they feel separated by membership in different economic classes. For example, a barber in a small shop may feel greater unity with his employer on the basis of their common interest in cutting hair than he feels with a textile weaver or a secretary, on the basis of their common economic exploitation.

Finally, common interpersonal experience within the industrial or commercial framework may be a factor overriding class consciousness. A secretary

may develop a deep sense of loyalty to her employer on the basis of her admiration for him as a person. Similarly, she may feel a sense of common understanding with him—on the basis of solving common office problems, learning to free him of unnecessary annoyances, and following his business operations—more than she feels separated by different class positions. In sum, *the perception of the criterion of unity with, or separation from, others in the occupational structure may not be along the lines of relationship to ownership of the means of production.* This is a major determinant of “false” consciousness.

POLITICAL STRUCTURE

It is commonly assumed that the proliferation of class-dedicated political parties reflects a high degree of class consciousness and identification on the part of the population. Conversely, it is probably also true that the mere presence of class-dedicated parties, standing as symbols or standards of class unity and giving people a focus of identification, promotes class consciousness. A major party or political figure who explicitly stands in favor of one class tends to produce a heightened class identification among the members of the class for which he stands. The fact that major parties or figures do not explicitly stand for specific class interests in the United States tends to blur the citizen's perception of himself as a class member. Two factors rooted in the American political structure contribute to this absence of unifying class symbols.

The first is the system of territorial political representation.⁹ A candidate is elected to represent a particular district or larger geographical area, embracing *all* social and economic classes rather than, let us say, the syndicalist version of occupational representation. Thus, the candidate serves as a symbol of *inter-class unity* rather than the political agent of a particular class. This system subverts the emergence of political symbols of separate class interests in the United States.

A second factor rooted in the structure of the American political system is the competition for votes.¹⁰ In a complex, multi-faceted, heterogeneous

⁹ Robin M. Williams, Jr., *American Society* (New York: Knopf, 1951), p. 229, states that one of the results of territorial representation is that “... groups and interests are not given official representation by anyone entitled to act in their name”

¹⁰ Morris Rosenberg, “The Meaning of Politics in Mass Society,” *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 15 (Spring 1951), p. 14.

society, it is necessary for a candidate to obtain the political support of a substantial number of population segments rather than just one. The appeal to a particular class and the alienation of other class groups means probable political defeat. Hence candidates will claim to see to the interests of *all* classes or occupational groups, thereby obviating the possibility that they will encourage, or serve as a symbol of, class consciousness. The general absence of unequivocal special interest parties seriously inhibits a political focus for class consciousness.

MULTIPLE GROUP MEMBERSHIP

The third major perceptual obstacle in class identification is that of multiple group identification in a heterogeneous society. Class consciousness would presumably exist if people felt united on the basis of their common relationship to the means of production and opposed to those who stood in a different relationship. Such a development is subverted by accepting as one's reference group any group which cuts vertically across class lines.

Parsons has argued that the function of unclear status definition is that of a "cushioning mechanism" against the potentially disruptive effect of class on the institution of the family.¹¹ Conversely, family identification may serve as an obstacle to class consciousness. People commonly feel greater unity on the basis of common kinship experiences and family identification than separateness on the grounds of objective economic position.

Racial group identification is a factor of overwhelming importance inhibiting class unity. A poor southern white will almost invariably unite with, and defend, an upper-class southern white in opposition to a Negro who objectively belongs to the former's class.¹² Race unity is more important than class unity. Politically, the same pattern holds. To the extent that people vote for or against a candidate on the basis of his *race, religion, nationality, geographical origin*, etc., rather than on the basis of his economic principles or his position as a class symbol, to that extent do all classes in one group unite in opposition to all

classes in another group¹³ (upper and lower white unite against upper and lower Negro; upper and lower Protestant unite against upper and lower Catholic). In sum, one may perceive a member of one's own objective class as an enemy because one looks at him from the viewpoint of his religion, his race, his nationality, his residence, etc. Conversely, one may perceive a member of a different objective class as a friend because he has the same race, religion, or nationality. There are no psychological laws which demand that the individual use his class group as his major basis of identification rather than some other group.

STYLE OF LIFE

Consumption Continuous Rather Than Polarized. An important social characteristic likely to engender awareness of class differences are styles of life visibly represented by consumption items.¹⁴ In large parts of Europe the rich are clearly set off from the poor by items requiring a large financial investment, such as bathtubs and inside plumbing, the possession of automobiles, the wearing of a suit for weekday use. In medieval Europe the classes (or estates) could be visibly differentiated by the possession of horse and armor. In the United States this polarization of consumption is very incomplete. The possession of suits and bathtubs, while not universal, is so widespread that it is useless as a visible symbol of class differentiation. Consumption items requiring large investments, such as television sets, automobiles, and sets of furniture have, under the impetus of enormous installment buying, become available to wide segments of the population. The crucial factor from the viewpoint of perception is that there is no clear, visible, and unequivocal difference among classes in terms of possession of consumption items. The bourgeoisie are not obviously set apart from the proletariat by virtue of owning a car. The differentiation is continuous rather than polar. One man owns a newer or better car than another, but this will not induce a feeling of class consciousness in his *slightly* less fortunate fellow. Indeed, where jeal-

¹¹ Talcott Parsons, "An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," in *Essays in Sociological Theory* (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1949), p. 182.

¹² Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harpers, 1944).

¹³ See M. Ostrogorski, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties* (New York: Macmillan, 1908), II, 243; Louis Bean, *How to Predict Elections* (New York: Knopf, 1948), pp. 94-104; and V. O. Key, *Southern Politics* (New York: Knopf, 1949), for illustrations of the effects, respectively, of religious, nationality, and residential factors.

¹⁴ This point has been suggested by Professor S. M. Lipset of Columbia University.

ousy exists, it may often be directed against a member of the same class (e.g., neighbor, co-worker), who has a visible, though slight, material advantage. It is true that the differences at the consumption poles are enormous. However, the man in the slum has so little contact with the man in the yacht that these major differences are not constantly impressed upon him. Consumption poles do exist, but the general pattern is not one of polarization.

Homogeneity of Cultural Systems. Style of life reflected in different ideological cultural systems is an important factor producing consciousness of class. This is particularly important in the realm of leisure activities. A group may feel itself set off from, and in potential opposition to, another group, who like, enjoy, or are interested in different things; and if these likes or interests are related to class, then class consciousness and antagonism will emerge.

The structure of the mass communications industries—particularly press, radio, television, and film—tends to produce a similarity of cultural and ideological systems among the various classes. For reasons too elaborate to detail here, the communications industries live under an economic imperative to attract as wide an audience as possible and alienate the minimum number of people. The upshot of this fact is to bring to bear a vast machinery of communications for the spread among all elements of the population (using the lowest common denominator) of similar ideas and ideology, conventions and mores, tastes in music, humor, and drama, goals and aspirations, rules of conduct, etc. Mills has expressed this idea very forcefully:

Commercial jazz, soap opera, pulp fiction, comic strips, the movies, set the images, mannerisms, standards and aims of the urban masses. In one way or another, everyone is equal before these cultural machines; like technology itself, the mass media are nearly universal in their incidence and appeal. They are a kind of common denominator, a kind of scheme for pre-scheduled, mass emotions. . . .

The contents of the mass media are now a sort of common denominator of American experience, feeling, belief, and aspiration. They extend across the diversified material and social environments, and reaching lower into the age hierarchy, are received long before the age of consent, without explicit awareness.¹⁵

¹⁵ C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 333–334.

We do not, of course, hold the extreme position that class differences in passive leisure activities do not exist. We simply claim that there are economic pressures which work to propagate ideological and cultural uniformity. Such an influence works against the development of differential ideas, goals, tastes, and behavior which might otherwise grow out of different class positions. Hence, it blurs class differences and inhibits class consciousness.

UNIFYING AND CONFLICTING CULTURAL GOALS

The acceptance of any goals, aims, or ends cutting across class lines serves to stress inter-class agreement and inhibit class consciousness. Nationalism, particularly in wartime, focusses and sharpens the perceptions of members of all classes on a common enemy and common object of loyalty, thereby blurring the perception of objective class differences or making it a fringe, subsidiary consideration. Indeed, the relative ineffectiveness of the appeal, “workers of the world, unite” underlines the weakening effect of nationalism on class consciousness.

Conversely, the presence of *individual goals competitively sought* may produce enmity among members of the same class rather than unity.¹⁶ This operates most significantly in a society strongly characterized by the norms of individualism and competition. Let us say a number of workers are striving for the same job and are strongly motivated by family obligations to obtain it. If they feel that the employer blocks them from their goal of earning a living, then class consciousness will be fostered. If, on the contrary, they each feel that the other worker is a competitor, an obstacle in the path of the fulfillment of their private goals, they are liable to focus their antagonism on one another. The presence of an individual goal, sought by several people, instead of uniting people in the same objective position, may rather promote mutual rivalry, suspicion, and disidentification. This situation is particularly likely to develop in lower level office jobs. Indeed, it has been very plausibly suggested that a large number of minute rank differences in a bureaucratic hierarchy is likely to discourage unity among workers for two reasons: first, members tend to view one another in terms of superiority-inferiority instead

¹⁶ This general “form of interaction” is discussed in Georg Simmel, *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. by Kurt H. Wolff (Glencoe, Illinois: The Free Press, 1950), p. 195.

of equality; and second, workers on an equal level feel antagonistic and competitive toward one another on the basis of their struggle to obtain the next slightly higher position. In both cases consciousness of class unity among these people is undermined. Rather than feeling united against a common class enemy, they feel mutual distrust on the basis of their struggle against one another.

SELF-IMAGE

Of critical significance in the development of class consciousness is the individual's self-image.¹⁷ In general, we may say that an individual stakes himself on a picture of what he would like to be and usually seeks to realize this picture in reality. Stratification theory usually incorporates this psychological phenomenon under the heading of "social mobility striving" without recognizing that several perceptions are possible. If we accept the notion that the precondition for class consciousness exists when an individual possesses an internalized picture of his economic and social position which accords with his objective economic position, and that he identifies with that picture, then false consciousness may emerge under three conditions: (1) The individual identifies with his *future* self, e.g., an ambitious young worker who hopes by diligence and initiative to elevate himself to supervisory capacity or eventually own his own business; (2) The individual identifies with his *past* self, e.g., the member of an overcrowded profession or the unsuccessful businessman who must enter

the employ of others, but still pictures himself as an occupant of his former class position; (3) The individual has a distorted image of his *present* self, e.g., the clerk or secretary who identifies with the owning group. In other words, distorted class consciousness may appear on the basis of the individual's perception of what he is, was, or will be.

We would expect class consciousness to be great where the individual's past and anticipated future position accords with his present position. This is particularly likely to occur in a static society, one in which there is little social movement and in which a view into the past or future is not likely to produce a perceptual distortion of class position. In a mobile society, however, such distortion is especially likely to occur. Those who descend look to their past class positions, while those who hope to ascend identify with their future classes.

SUMMARY

In this paper we have indicated that there are certain factors rooted in the social structure which cause men to see their class positions in a light different from that to be expected on the basis of their objective positions. This does not mean that class consciousness does not exist. Our aim has been to show certain perceptual factors which prevent class consciousness from being sharper and stronger. There are many structural factors cited in this paper which promote class consciousness, but it has not been our aim to discuss these. It is a subject of further analysis, and one crucial to the theoretical adequacy of the sociology of knowledge, to determine those perceptual factors rooted in the social structure which promote class consciousness and identification.

¹⁷ The concept of the idealized self-image has been extensively discussed by Karen Horney, *Our Inner Conflicts* (New York: Norton, 1945), and in *Neurosis and Human Growth* (New York: Norton, 1950).

SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH COUNCIL AWARDS

The SSRC has announced four categories of awards to be offered in 1954. The awards, and persons eligible to apply, are: Research Training Fellowships, predoctoral students who have completed all degree requirements except thesis, and postdoctoral students preferably under 35; Grants-in-Aid of Research, mature social scientists, not candidates for degrees; Faculty Research Fellowships, young faculty members who have already made significant research contributions; Undergraduate Research Stipends, students about to complete the third year of study toward the bachelor's degree.

Inquiries about these and possible other grants should be addressed to: Dr. Elbridge Sibley, Social Science Research Council, 726 Jackson Place, N.W., Washington 6, D. C. January 4, 1954 will be the closing date for all applications.